Take F135

young man! [Ed., the text is not translated from mid-page 17 to the second paragraph, page 19.]

[18] Since the chief goal of our expedition was to study the practices and customs connected with the material and everyday life of the native, as well as to gather objects for our collection, our stay among the various tribes was too

Fig. 14. Natural Deformations among the Native. (1) Basikutu woman; (2) Barakata woman; (3) Basikutu child.

short to permit a thorough study of their religious life and its attendant customs.

We ascertained that the native, as a rule, acknowledges the existence of a higher spirit. During my stay in the village of Kapanda, Banfumungu tribe, I had the opportunity to question a chief on the subject.

"Who causes the sun and the moon to rise? Who gave you the fish of the river and the animals of the plain, Matali?"

The chief looked at me for an instant, dumbfounded, and then replied, "Nzambi ve Mundele?" "Was it not Nzambi, White man?"

"Why, then, do you not call upon Nzambi to protect your crops, favor your fishing, and grant you success in hunting, Matali?" [20]

"Would he want to help us, Mundele?"

"Why not?"

"Is he not exclusively good?" Metali continued.

"If he is so good, should he not listen to you, Metali?"

"Are not misfortunes caused by the ndoki (spirits), Mundele?"

"But is not Nzambi sufficiently powerful to ward off those ndoki, Metali?"

"Are not the ndoki sent against those who have done evil to others? Would Nzambi still be good if he were to ward off the ndoki, who punish the evil-doers? Ya Mundele, ya! Nzambi is good, he does only good, why call upon him?"

This bit of conversation sums up the native's conception of the supreme being. One calls upon him to explain what one cannot understand, but there is no cult devoted to him. Everything that is good for the society and whose source or origin is not known comes from him.

Aside from this spirit, the various tribes believe that there is a multitude of other spirits, some stronger than others, who are all very much concerned with the natives. They are all good in the sense that what is obtained from them is always beneficial to someone, although sometimes it is quite harmful to someone else. For this reason the native has created nkisi [Ed., fetish] and ndoki.

The fetisher is supposed to be able to communicate with these spirits. He keeps from them, according to native belief, the secrets of which plants help in healing and who has killed someone. He can obtain from them the punishment of a thief, because such punishment is beneficial to the one robbed. Through their intervention he can assure good fishing, guarantee rich hunting, facilitate childbirth, heal the sick, etc., or, on the other hand, make any enterprise fail.

The native believes that success of any kind is granted by these spirits. He attempts, therefore, to secure their good graces as much as possible. Before hunting, fishing, childbirth, etc., he goes to the fetisher. For a fairly high fee, the latter calls upon the spirits and hands over the appropriate nkisi. If the results do not conform to his expectations, the native blames [21] neither the fetisher nor the nkisi, but a ndoki more powerful than the nkisi invoked. [Ed., a passage is omitted here.]

L. Mbam--20 E-6 (1913-1914) 1914 FOSS Mongo FOSS
Sakata F493

The intervention of the nkisi or nkoki is only a temporary one. Once an undertaking has been successfully carried out, the native has no further use for the object given to him by the fetisher to insure success. On the next occasion he will go back to the fetisher and ask for a new nkisi, which he would always like to be more powerful than the nkoki. Unfortunately the fetisher cannot find such an all-powerful nkisi. A spirit that he has invoked with success for years, whose power seems inexhaustible,

Fig. 15. Implements of Diapolo, Basakata Fetisher of the Bokoso Region.

will one day fail him. Five, ten, fifteen times success has followed the invocation, and then, there it is, an enterprise under the same auspices fails miserably. A new nkisi, more powerful, has become nkoki, and the native returns to the fetisher and demands that he do better, always better! With the exception of certain figurines carved in wood and used as hunting fetishes, the physical representation of nkisi consists of an assortment of the

finally, that sexual relations are strictly forbidden to them during menstruation (-kpwa or kwa mingé, literally "to be ill here" or "to see the moon," and other similar expressions). The reason given is that a woman in that difficult condition should be spared all additional annoyance.

1. Bilimá

The Nkundó attribute the procreation of children sometimes to God (Njakombe) and sometimes to spirits (bilimá, pl. bilimá). God forms (-dinga) the children in the mother's womb, but at the same time the bilimá provide the men among the progeny. (1)

1. Contrary to what is reported by Father Lemaçhe (Congo, 1922, Vol. 1, p. 363) concerning the Ekonda, the tribes that I have known never address prayers for children to God, although they attribute the gift of children to Him. This matter does not concern God (Njakombe or Mbombikindi) directly, but rather a particular bilimá.

Sterility, which is a common phenomenon here, is not imputed to sorcery but is considered an innate flaw. Natives usually claim that God refuses them children.

There is no point in trying to make the natives resolve this apparent contradiction; they would not succeed. They simply state the two points. I say "apparent contradiction," for as the Nkundó admit that the bilimá are subject to Njakombe, the contradiction is not real, and the two propositions can be [470] reconciled by explaining the intervention of the spirits as an operation which is dependent on divine action: they are secondary, intermediary causes, although our natives do not make this philosophical analysis.

To explain all the beliefs pertaining to spirits would be to go outside the framework of this study. Nevertheless, we cannot leave out those details which closely touch on our subject.

There is a large number of diverse spirits, and almost every village has several in its territory. Each one has its own habitat in some singular place or object which stimulates the imagination: enormous trees, oval hollows which form pools of a sort (*ɗimbo*, pl. *bodimbo*), steep slopes, extraordinary pieces of limestone, whirlpools in streams and rivers, etc.

The Nkundó pray to the *bilimá* in order to obtain children. For that purpose they make offerings of food and money. To test someone's feelings toward it, an *elimá* may come to him in the evening or at night in the guise of a known person and ask for some small present. Unhappy is he who shows himself to be stingy: he will be deprived of the object of his desire, or his child will be premature or born sickly or deformed.

In addition to taking a generally friendly attitude toward the spirit, another means of ensuring his intervention is open to a woman. She can procure some kaolin (*mongó*) at the spirit's habitat (a *ɗimbo*, preferably). In the evening she mixes it with some plants. She smears her abdomen with this mixture, known as *inó*. She continues the treatment throughout her pregnancy; it has the property of removing everything in her which is of such a nature that it might oppose the spirit (*ɓɔ́ɓɔlá lokoko jwá bilíma ílíe ndá likundó*).

Certain water spirits are known for their generosity, for instance Irémbɔlombé or Ekɛ́kalombé of Mpaká, [471] who is considered to be a female being. She goes on distant voyages to seek a supply of children. On her return she appears to someone and communicates the news to him so that he may spread it. But she orders all women who desire her favors to observe some form of abstinence. Sometimes she sings to amuse or calm the children. On that day mothers must not use songs to pacify their little ones or to put them to sleep and can use only soft words for that purpose. Otherwise the child would die, for to do so would be to disregard the old *elimá*'s kindness.

Sometimes the spirits give signs of their blessing. A woman who is bathing on the shore just at the time a cargo arrives there will soon see her most intimate wish fulfilled. From forest spirits

women receive other signs: an unexpected obstacle in the form of a stone, a stump, a root, the capture of a tree frog which comes and jumps onto the shoulder, etc.

A spirit loves and protects only a child he himself has given. He abhors and hates to the death the living gifts of his fellow spirits. If there are several *bilimá* in the vicinity of a single village, however, the Nkundó explain the absence of the cruel rivalries by considering them as related; one is the husband, another the wife, others the children; that is why they do not oppose each other.

Thus an *elimá* is hostile to any fetus not of his creation. Nevertheless, his spiteful action only begins at the end of several weeks, and even then the pregnancy must have gone far enough to be visible (*ifimi ifiwia isimbá*). Does it take time for him to obtain evidence that the fruit in question is undoubtedly his own gift?

In any case the consequence of this belief is that a woman who has been pregnant for several months cannot long [472] reside in foreign parts, and one who, after conception, has accompanied a husband who has gone to work elsewhere, returns to her village to complete the last period of pregnancy and to deliver.

However, there is an antidote (*mongó*) against this murderous action of the spirits. It may be obtained from a person who knows the recipe (this person is not the *nkanga* or "doctor"). The protective compound is wrapped in a bit of cloth and, by means of a thread of fibers from the *lokóká* creeper, is tied in the middle of a rope braided with the fibers of the *ikolayafodó* bush, which the threatened woman ties around her hips. (1)

1. These data on the subject of the *elimá* is diametrically opposed to the ideas of Father Schebesta (Vollblutneger und Halbzwerge, p. 241, and W. Schmidt, Der Ursprung der Gottesidee, Vol. 4, p. 322), based on the word of his interpreter, Bern. Bongonga of Bodiama (Bombwanja) (now deceased), who was

obliged in my presence to retract his statements under the pressure of crushing objections on the part of a considerable number of other natives. See also Father Boelaert, Nkonge Lexon, 1938, p. 48, and Congo, 1938, Vol. 1, p. 42, as well as Hulstaert, Congo, 1938, Vol. 2, p. 678.

2. The beginnings of pregnancy

The first months following the cessation of menstruation are called *bofowo*. The oral expression is *-fowo jimi* (*jimi* meaning "force")

A woman who has just conceived no longer has any success in looking for caterpillars or in fishing (by scooping, whether with *bofowo* hooks or drugs, called *lisolo*). She is unable to catch anything while the efforts of her companions are fruitful. That is because the *bofowo* is *wɔkɔ*, that is, a cause for a lack of success (*bɔmɔnɔ bɔ wɔkɔ kilɔlɔ*). Note that this word may be derived from the verb *kɔ*, "to place an obstacle."

The husband of a woman in this condition is no better off. His wife's *wɔkɔ* is communicated to him as well as to all those of his relatives who [472] live in the same village or, as the natives say, *lɔt mpɛkɛ ɛmɔtshɔlɔ*, "one who eats from the same pot," and *okɔtɔ lɔmɔlɔ ɛmɔtshɔlɔ*, "one who lives in the same house." Friends are not harmed, even if they live in the same settlement as the pregnant woman, nor are relatives living elsewhere.

The *wɔkɔ* brings misfortune to anyone tainted with it. Thus if he goes hunting, he will return empty handed; if he participates in a war he will be wounded. Furthermore, if there is a leopard in the vicinity he will choose to kill that man. An elephant will detect his presence and try to kill him. A snake will bite him more readily than another. At market he will be charged more for everything.

This burdensome situation continues during the entire period of pregnancy, hence until the birth of the child.